Caddo County: A Shining Example of the Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative

Work along Sugar Creek in Caddo County has been in full swing since 2010 repairing damage due to a 500-year storm event. The storm dumped nearly 17 inches of rain on the Sugar Creek watershed draining the flood waters and runoff from about 230 square miles into the Washita River.

Through a Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative (CCPI), the Oklahoma Conservation Commission, NRCS, and local districts, are providing much needed funding to repair and restore damaged cropland and pastureland in the Sugar Creek floodplain. During FY-2012 nearly \$560,000 has been provided by NRCS and OCC to construct grade control structures, diversions, and apply vegetative practices to stop the erosion that is threatening the watershed. Additional work is being completed in the watershed to address damage caused by a degrading Sugar Creek channel, which includes shaping and filling of gullies, and vegetative practices to stabilize the highly erosive soils. Pictured above is Sugar Creek Site L-43, a high hazard dam that was severely damaged in the flood event and has been rehabilitated. Site L-44 is also under construction and nearing completion. There have been several rock drop structures designed and installed in the main channel of Sugar

NRCS: FOCUS ON SOIL HEALTH

NRCS Retired Chief Dave White has said, "Soil is one of our most important resources. It is the factory of our food—and without healthy productive soil, life as we know it would no longer exist." Improving soil health is one of the most effective ways for farmers to increase production and profitability. A healthy soil is soil that infiltrates and holds water, it cycles nutrients to water and feeds plants, and it filters potential pollutants. Producers like Sam Vinyard, Jackson County has converted both conventionally farmed dry land and irrigated cropland fields to no-till farming methods. Vinyard said, "We are seeing greater soil moisture, resulting in higher yields. Improving soil health puts us on a more level playing field as we deal with the adversities of weather." He credits District Conservationist Stacy Riley for assisting him in improving soil health. The NRCS investment in a Rain Simulator is proving to be money well spent. Greg Scott and Steve Alspach delivered 21 one-day seminars in 2012 on soil health, using the Rain Simulator to demonstrate how land use affects water absorption in the soil. NRCS employees across the state are seeing an increase in conversions to no-till from conventional farming. During the period of 2009-2012 producers received assistance through EQIP to bring more than 870,000 acres under no-till management.



NRCS Rain Simulator Demonstration





Lessons from the Dust Bowl; a Conservation Success Story

NRCS, OCC, and the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts (OACD) joined with OETA and other Conservation Partners in a statewide outreach effort designed to connect the people in drought-stricken Oklahoma with conservation resources and to share the personal stories of those who survived the Dust Bowl. The focus of the project was to encourage people to learn more about the need for conservation and to watch the Ken Burns landmark documentary on the Dust Bowl, which aired on November 17, 2012 on PBS. The Dust Bowl is considered to be the worst manmade ecological disaster in American history.

The key elements to the project included hosting seven community events across the state, hearing stories from Dust Bowl survivors and showing short screenings of the documentary. Almost 4,000 people attended these meetings. As a result, over 300,000 Oklahomans watched the documentary. This was a record for OETA as it became the largest watched program in the history of public television in the state of Oklahoma. This project has continued into 2013 with an educational campaign to explore Dust Bowl related history and conservation.

"It was a classic tale of human beings pushing too hard against nature and nature pushing back"

-Timothy Egan

"The Worst Hard Time"



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

NRCS Natural Resources Conservation Service

OKLAHOMA

annual report



"The Nation that Destroys its Soil, Destroys Itself"

-Franklin D. Roosevelt



HELPING PEOPLE HELP THE LAND

Our Mission: The Natural Resource Conservation Service provides leadership in a partnership effort to help people conserve, maintain and improve our Natural Resources and Environment. Working side by side with landowners, we identify natural resource concerns, such as water quality and quality issues, soil erosion, air quality, wetlands and wildlife habitat, and develop unique conservation plans for restoring and protecting resources. NRCS helps Oklahoma and the nation balance economic goals with the needs of the environment; ensuring sustainable productive lands that supply food, fiber, forest products and energy for all citizens

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Message from NRCS Acting State Conservationist John Mueller



These times are very challenging for Oklahoma's farmers and ranchers. The drought continues amid some forecasts that this may represent only the early stages of a prolonged drought, and there are a great many unknowns associated with the nation's economy. Yet, farmers and ranchers have proven time and again that they are resilient and excellent managers of the land.

An extremely exciting area of recent research involves Soil Health. Scientists are finding that something that appears so basic to life is actually extremely complex, and practices focusing on improving soil health will serve as a potential avenue to improve both a cooperator's bottom line and the resources base. In today's climate that's a tough combination to beat, so NRCS and its partners will be working to help you help the land.

I want to express my sincere appreciation to all the members of the conservation partnership and the employees of the NRCS who have proven so instrumental in making a difference on the land.

Message from OCC Executive Director, Mike Thralls



Former Congressman Wes Watkins never tired of showing visitors a three-legged milking stool that Mason Mungle had given him during the years that Mason led the Oklahoma Conservation Commission. That stool represented the three partners of conservation who have stood strong together since their inception — steadily and consistently carrying the message and works of conservation to each successive generation of land users.

Conservation districts, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Oklahoma Conservation Commission continue to work in harmony, whether the issue is flood control, Farm Bill delivery or water quality. Our successes are a direct result of our combined strengths and qualities. The term "Locally Led" carries a meaning that has been well developed over time by the strong leadership of conservation district directors. Combined with the best in expertise from NRCS and state support from the Conservation Commission, this document reports the latest accomplishments of Oklahoma's Conservation Partnership.

Long may the Oklahoma Conservation Partnership continue to set the national standard for how to work together in protecting and using our natural resources, and continue to ensure that those resources are passed on better than they were, ready for the next generation of conservationists.

FY11 and FY12 NRCS Contracts and Financial Assistance to Oklahoma Participants by Program

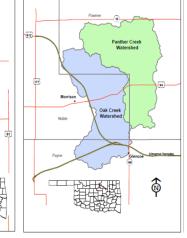
Mandatory funding: Farm Bill Programs	FY11 Contracts	FY11 Dollars	FY12 Contracts	FY12 Dollars
Environmental Quality Incentives Program	1293	\$22.4 million	1375	\$24.3 million
Wetlands Reserve Program	13	\$8 million	19	\$6.7 million
Conservation Stewardship Program	590	\$11.1 million	583	\$9.1 million
Agricultural Water Enhancement Program	22	\$1.1 million	10	\$528,000
Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program	10	\$185,084	6	\$582,000
Grassland Reserve Program	2	\$1.5 million	0	\$3,000
Total, Farm Bill Programs	1930	\$44.3 million	1993	\$41.2 million

SPECIALINITIATIVES

NRCS has been implementing programs that are referred to as Landscape Initiatives. The focus of these programs has been to identify natural resource concerns that cover a wide area and address those concerns by delivering conservation practices to those vulnerable resource concerns. These programs are identified through locally led efforts, leading to program development to address concerns, such as endangered species, with the hope of minimizing regulatory actions on agricultural producers. The initiatives are also referred to as "Conservation without Boundaries". The initiatives that provide assistance to Oklahoma producers are: Lesser Prairie Chicken Initiative (LPCI), National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI), Illinois River and Eucha-Spavinaw Lake Initiative (IRWI), Ogallala Aquifer Initiative (OAI) and most recently the National Soil Health Initiative.

The National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI) is designed to improve water quality in degraded streams throughout the U.S. NRCS in consultation with DEQ and Oklahoma Conservation Commission with local input selected 4 watersheds for inclusion in the NWQI in 2012. The watersheds were selected based on agricultural contributions to water quality degradation, history of monitoring, and local interest in program participation. The Watersheds selected in Oklahoma include Sand Creek and Turkey Creek in Garfield County as well as Panther Creek and Oak Creek in Noble, Pawnee and Payne Counties. Field Offices received 34 applications for financial assistance and developed 27 contracts to implement conservation practices on nearly 8,000 acres.







The Ogallala Aquifer Initiative (OAI) is a seven State initiative designed to reduce Aquifer overdraft and improve water quality throughout the Ogallala Aquifer. Field Offices received, processed, and evaluated 28 applications for financial assistance in northwestern Oklahoma. Over \$1 million of financial assistance was provided to agricultural producers to implement water saving practices on nearly 3,000 acres in the three Oklahoma panhandle counties.

The Lesser Prairie Chicken (LPCI) is a six state cooperative effort designed to maintain and enhance critical habitat for the lesser prairie chicken, which is a candidate for listing as an endangered species throughout the region. Field Offices in Northwestern Oklahoma received 27 applications for financial assistance. Contracts were developed to implement conservation practices on 19,000 acres of critical habitat. Total obligations for these contracts were \$857,530. Historically underserved participants represented 43% of these contracts.





The Illinois River Watershed (IRWI) is designed to improve water quality in the Illinois River watershed. The watershed is an important resource, providing recreation opportunities as well as a source of drinking water for many communities. The Initiative is a cooperative effort with Arkansas NRCS and the Oklahoma Conservation Commission. Over 80 applications were received from producers throughout the watershed. Contracts were developed to implement conservation practices on nearly 11,000 acres with total obligations of over \$1.5 million. Historically underserved participants received 91% of the contracts awarded in the IRWI.